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Safety Belt Usage Before and After Enactment of a Mandatory Usage Ordinance (Lexington-Fayette County, Kentucky)

On January 25, 1990 the Urban County Council of Lexington-Fayette County, Kentucky passed a local safety belt ordinance. While the State of Kentucky has a child safety restraint law for all children under forty inches in height, it does not have a mandatory safety belt law. Lexington-Fayette County is the only municipality in Kentucky, and one of only a few in the United States, to adopt such an ordinance.

The adopted ordinance applies to all passenger vehicles traveling on any roadway in Lexington-Fayette county except school, church or public buses. The ordinance requires the driver and each occupant, regardless of seating position, to wear a safety belt. The driver is responsible for the proper restraint of all passengers under 16 years of age. The safety belt ordinance is enforced as a secondary offense and carries a fine for violation of not more than \$25.

Analysis and Results

The Office of Traffic Safety Programs of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration provided a grant to the University of Kentucky Transportation Center to evaluate the impact of the local ordinance on safety belt usage. The objective of the evaluation was to measure changes in safety belt usage before and after adoption and implementation of the ordinance, and to measure the number of citations issued for safety belt violations after enforcement of the ordinance began on July 1, 1990.

Four surveys were conducted to measure changes in safety belt use levels before and after passage and implementation of the ordinance. Surveys were conducted in August and December, 1989 and in June and July/August, 1990. The August and December, 1989 surveys were conducted before passage and implementation of the safety belt ordinance. The June, 1990 survey was conducted as Public Information and Education (PI&E) activities began. The final survey, July/August, 1990, was conducted after enforcement of the ordinance began on July 1, 1990.

During each survey, observations were made at 24 separate locations throughout Lexington-Fayette county. The same survey locations were used for each survey, and all surveys were conducted during daylight hours. The survey results are presented in the following table.

	Survey Wave			
	8/89	12/89	6/90	7/90
Driver	38%	36%	46%	76%
Right Front Seat Occupant (≥ 4)	28%	35%	40%	70%
Children Under Four (all seating positions)	60%	80%	81%	83%

From July 1-September 30, 1990, 492 citations were issued for violation of the safety belt ordinance. Adjudication of the vast majority of the violations resulted in conviction and fine. There is no indication that enforcement of the ordinance has placed any significant strain on the court system.

Discussion

The survey results indicate that there has been a substantial increase in safety belt use associated with passage and implementation of the safety belt ordinance. After implementation and during the PI&E campaign, driver and safety belt use increased from 36% to 46% while front seat occupant safety belt use increased from 35% to 40%. After enforcement began on July 1, 1990, driver safety belt use increased to 76% and front seat occupant safety belt use increased to 70%. The results corroborate previous research which show that an effective safety belt program must include an integrated enforcement and PI&E effort to achieve high safety belt compliance.

Passage of the safety belt ordinance and its implementation resulted from a series of actions and activities by a number of community officials. This included individuals from both the courts and enforcement. Adoption of the ordinance would not likely have occurred without the commitment and support of these community officials. Additional analysis is being considered to determine the impact of the increased safety belt use on traffic injuries and fatalities.

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